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ABSTRACT

Long range effects may be of three varieties: those which are observable in the immediate period subsequent to exposure but are long range because of their continuing repetitive accumulation with each exposure; those which represent the cumulative or delayed impact on individuals of exposure to television; or those which represent the immediate influence of content that emerges with the evolution of the medium. One possible long range effect is to be found in the inference, supported by experimental and field studies, that television violence is a cause of increased aggressiveness on the part of the young. This leads to the speculation that there may be other long-term effects. One of these is a weakening of parental control over information reaching young persons because of the trend toward increased frankness and liberality in the treatment of sensitive topics. Another is the reallocation of time away from other activities in favor of consumption of mass media. A third is the increased influence of the vicarious experience of the mass media, and particularly television, in socialization. (WBC)

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THE LONG-RANGE IMPACT OF TELEVISION

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The question to be addressed is, "Do we really know anything about the long-range impact of television?" First, I will raise certain conceptual issues about what we mean by long-range effects. Second, I will identify a few long-range effects for which there is some evidence.

Conceptual Issues

It is very common to evaluate the behavioral and social science research on the impact of mass communications in terms of evidence for "immediate" vs. "long-range" effects. The conclusion frequently reached is that there is evidence for "immediate" effects but little or none for "long-range" effects.

Such a conclusion, although it is certainly consistent with some bodies of evidence, may sometimes be in error. What it overlooks is the fact that mass communications are repetitive and omnipresent, so that "immediate" effects are in a state of constant successive repetition. The continuing accumulation of "immediate" effects may become a long-range effect because the accumulation occurs again and again.

The conclusion which is thus qualified derives from the domain of attitude change and effects of information and political campaigns on public opinion and behavior, where laboratory-type experiments have consistently demonstrated various effects of communications while surveys and field studies typically have not documented effects specifically and readily attributable to exposure to communications (Hovland, 1954; Klapper, 1960). These findings, along with the finding of various studies that behavior and attitudes subsequent to exposure to mass communications are often the same as would have been predicted from characteristics of the individual in the absence of such exposure, led to the view that mass communications typically "reinforce" predispositions (Klapper, 1957, 1960, 1963).

The domain of television violence and aggression leads to a different interpretation. Here, too, laboratory-type experiments demonstrate that exposure to mass communications can affect behavior--specifically, that the viewing of violent portrayals can increase the likelihood of subsequent aggressiveness of children and adolescents immediately after viewing (Bandura, 1973; Berkowitz, 1962). However, surveys and field studies also find a real-life relationship between the viewing of violence and aggressive behavior and attitudes favoring the solving of problems by aggressive behavior and attitudes favoring the solving of problems by aggression (Chaffee, 1972; McLeod, Atkin, and Chaffee, 1972a, 1972b; Eron et al., 1972; Dominick and Greenberg, 1972). The consistency between the findings from the two bodies of research, and the fact that the non-laboratory real-life correlations have persisted when various possibly contaminating variables have been taken into account, make the inference that television violence is a cause of increased aggressiveness on the part of the young the most plausible interpretation (Chaffee, 1972; Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, 1972). This a "long-range" effect, and it leads to the speculation that other long-range effects may occur and that the reinforcement viewpoint may cause us to overlook effects by emphasizing that they are likely to be consistent with predispositions.

There are also several other possible kinds of "long-range" effects. To make clear their difference, let us specify an "immediate" effect. Let us call it X_1 (with the subscript $_1$ denoting the defining aspects of the effect). At any given time, there may be greater or lesser social impact as a function of the amount of viewing by individuals, size of the audience, and quantity of the particular kind of content in question broadcast, and the like. We could express the degree of social impact by an equation that would incorporate these factors. The point of this crude model is to emphasize that there are at least two kinds of "long-range" effects which it does not cover. These are effects sufficiently different from X_1 that they must be designated otherwise, such as X_2. The difference may inhere

in the fact of delay or in the character of the effect. This is what we might call a "true" long-range effect--an effect occurring at some future point in time that is not the repetitive accumulation of numerous presently observable "immediate" effects. In simplistic form, the effect of television is now X_1 plus X_2 or, in the absence of an "immediate" effect, X_2 alone. The non-laboratory correlations between violence viewing and aggression are mute in regard to whether they represent an X_1-type, an X_1-plus X_2-type, or an X_2-type of effect. There are several kinds of X_2 effects, because X_2 can be the function of cumulative exposure, of a delayed effect independent of further exposure, or of exposure to new stimuli attributable to evolutionary trends in braodcast content.

When we speak of "long-range" effects, then, we may mean several different kinds of effects with different implications for their detection and for theory:

@ Effects which are observable in the immediate period subsequent to exposure to television but are also long-range because of their continuing repetitive accumulation with each exposure.

@ Effects which represent the cumulative or delayed impact on individuals of exposure to television.

@ Effects which represent the immediate influence of content that emerges only with the evolution of the medium.

Possible Effects

We are very poorly equipped to specify long-range effects except of the first type. The bodies of data on which we can draw are limited and the various methods, designs, and statistical tools that we can employ are open to challenge by irate consumers and warranty default by their manufacturers.* Television is like the automobile and other major technological innovations.

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*Many of the questions may be answered by a study now under way by Dr. Thomas Cook of Northwestern University under the title, "Evaluating the Societal Impact of Television: An Investigation Using Interrupted Time-series Methodology." It will take advantage of many naturally-occurring circumstances which altered the availability of television in various communities to identify differences in a wide variety of social indicators presumably attributable to the medium.

It is part of a set of influences and a vast array of changes in which linking one innovation to one particular change is very difficult. Furthermore, at any given time the incentive to invest in longitudinal research to detect such influences is usually less than the incentive to conduct studies of more immediate payoff, although in retrospect we may sometimes conclude that we erred in our priorities.

The detection of long-range effects is made more difficult by the fact that as we turn from the past to the future we are faced with taking into account events and trends which may alter the context in which television is received, may alter television itself, or may in some way combine with television to produce an impact that at the time is beyond our vision. General Westmoreland has argued that television coverage of the Vietnam war has made war itself less acceptable to the American public. If there has been any such momentous impact, the necessary condition was the war itself, a circumstance external to the medium and not a readily predictable occurrence.

Nevertheless, there are three related kinds of long-range effects on which the evidence encourages us to speculate. They exemplify each of the kinds of long-term effects, and can be covered under the topics of:

@ Family control of information.

@ Media consumption.

@ Vicarious socialization.

Family Control of Information

Perhaps only those with a pre-television childhood can fully appreciate the changes in popular entertainment. The most noteworthy current example is Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman. However, the trend that it exemplifies has been long underway and is likely to continue. The trend is toward increased liberality and frankness in the treatment of sex, ethnic relations, interpersonal relations, and a variety of personal problems--although male chauvinism must stumble at the realization that these steps began in the female ghetto of the afternoon soaps. The prediction is based not solely

on trends within television entertainment, but on the tendency of television entertainment to be shaped by its competition with theater movies. The increase over the years of violence on television for example, has paralleled a similar increase in violence in the movies, and competition between the media is probably one cause (Clark and Blankenburg, 1972). Given the latitude enjoyed by theater movies in regard to violence, and the efforts to restrain violence on television, liberality and frankness in the treatment of "adult" topics seems likely as the medium's most competitive response. One effect is a diminution of parental and other adult control over the introduction into the home of topics and issues. Adult hesitancy or reserve was once sufficient for effective adult censorship. Given the trend in television content, silence in effect amounts to the transfer to the young viewer of the authority to raise sensitive topics. This is not to deny that television is essentially a follower of social change, and reflects our society, but to recognize that our society is heterogeneous and to assert that in reflecting certain sectors it brings novel experiences and messages to others.

Media Consumption

The best estimate is that television has increased mass media consumption by perhaps as much as an hour, with most of the increase accounted for by consumption of television itself (Robinson, 1972; Robinson and Converse, 1972; Robinson, Converse, and Szalai, 1972). This reallocation of time has apparently been at the expense of a variety of other activities. These activities include sleep, the attending of social gatherings away from home, radio listening, book reading, engaging in miscellaneous leisure activities, attending theater movies, conversing, and doing household tasks. One observer has argued that in temporal terms, the effect of the automobile on time spent in daily transportation and of major appliances on time devoted to housework has been slight compared to the increase in mass media consumption and the necessary reduction of other activities brought about by television (Robinson, 1972). Americans spend about 40 percent of their leisure

time with television, The past decade has seen a steady increase in hours of television consumption per television household. This increase has occurred despite an increase in expressed public dissatisfaction with television, which some have interpreted as simply a reflection of its increasing importance and prominence (Bower, 1973). The trend toward increased exposure, despite the possibility of some minor interruption by the shifts in programming content brought about by the "family viewing" code adopted by the television industry in early 1975 and other efforts to restrict violence and sex during hours wher the quantity of young viewers in the audience is large, has probably not reached its limit because of the increased choice of programming that will be brought about by technological innovations as cable, pay-TV, and in-home playback, which will draw additional viewers to the screen. This absorption of time, a scarce personal good, is probably one of the major long-range effects of television, and the real cost in foregone alternatives--in leisure, in family interaction, in participation in activities with others--is probably not minor although we have no metric for it other than minutes and hours.

Vicarious Socialization

Socialization is the process by which a maturing individual becomes a member of society by learning the values, norms, and taboos which will allow him to function effectively, and it depends on exposure to the behavior of others which can be emulated and on the receipt of information. Once parents, teachers, peers, and the various social institutions in which they function had a monopoly on such communication. Television has challenged their dominance.

We know that children can acquire new ways of behaving from television portrayals (Bandura, 1969, 1971, 1973). We also know that exposure to television portrayals can alter the intensity of subsequent behavior of adolescents (Berkowitz, 1962, 1973; Tannenbaum and Zillmann, 1975), thereby altering the interaction between the individual and the environment on which feedback and the reinforcement of behavior, crucial to the development of patterns of behavior, is contingent. There is evidence, too, that television

sometimes serves as a source for the young of information important to socialization, such as beliefs about how people perform their various social and occupational roles (DeFleur and DeFleur, 1967), the social norms of dating (Gerson, 1966), and public events (Chaffee, Ward, and Tipton, 1970; Tolley, 1973). However, it should be emphasized that television's influence does not occur in a vacuum, and the evidence does not support the contention that television contravenes or is superordinate to the influence of parents and others. The evidence is that television is most influential when alternative sources are absent (DeFleur and DeFleur, 1967), and a great deal of evidence indicates that parents in particular play an extremely large role, both in shaping motives which lead young viewers to the medium and as powerful figures whose views and attitudes frequently shape the interpretation and influence of what is viewed (Tolley, 1973; Chaffee, 1972; Chaffee, McLeod, and Wackman, 1973; Chaffee, McLeod, and Atkin, 1971).

A datum from a CBS-sponsored national survey is striking testimony that there is some tendency by parents to recognize the competition from television as a socializing agent. Between the ages of nine and twelve, when the portrayals of television begin to become relevant to young viewers in regard to important questions of values and beliefs, the attempt by parents to censor viewing <u>increased</u> over that for younger children (Bower, 1973). This is contrary to the typical trend for most activities of declining restrictions as a child grows older. It is not television <u>per se</u> or the consumption of time that parents think could be better spent on school work or other activities that is the source of their objections, because there is no increase in the attempt to control amount of viewing but only in the attempt to restrict exposure to specific content--to specify which grams should and should not be viewed. Of course, this is only an indicator of parental concern and not evidence of effects of any kind of programming on children, but it is very important evidence of the belief by some parents that television constitutes a challenge, particularly because it does not rest on views expressed by parents about programming but on their behavior in regard to their children.

The issue is not whether television has supplanted parents and other agents of socialization. It hasn't. The issue is the long-range effect of television on the constellation of socializing agents. Because of television, the trend has been toward the increased influence of the vicarious experience of the mass media. This trend is likely to continue. On the one hand, there is the likelihood of increased media exposure with increased diversity of available programming. On the other hand, there is the increased liberality and frankness in regard to "adult" and once-taboo topics, which will make television more frequently a source of information that parents and others will have to confront, a supplier of novel experiences, and a potential qualifier of parental views and attitudes.

In Sum

In sum, the long-range effects of television may involve the repetitive occurrence of immediate effects, cumulative or delayed effects, or immediate effects that are contingent on content present only with the evolution of the medium.

Three kinds of long-range effects appear to be: (1) The weakening of parental control over information reaching young persons because of the trend toward increased frankness and liberality in the treatment of sensitive topics. This is an example of a long-range effect dependent on the evolution of the medium. (2) The reallocation of time away from other activities in favor of consumption of mass media in general and television in particular. Although such an effect certainly represents a cumulative effect as the medium becomes disseminated throughout a society, once the medium is near ubiquitous as in the United States, it is an example of the repetitive accumulation of an immediate effect. (3) Increased influence of the vicarious experience of the mass media, and principally television, in socialization. Such effects, partly dependent on shifts in content, attributable to the evolution of the medium and on increased mass media consumption for which television is responsible, are a mixture of the repetitive accumulation of immediate effects and effects which are cumulative and/or delayed.

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